Model Activity Systems:
Dialogic Teacher Learning for Social Justice Teaching[1]

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Introduction

As teacher educators working in the field of social justice,[2] our interest focuses on the ways in which teachers learn to inscribe their professional activity within social movements (Robnett, 1997) for progressive change. The community of practice (COP) approach to understanding learning as a social process (Wenger, 1998) has a lot of currency right now in teacher education programs (TEPs) (Oakes & Lipton, 1999; Garcia, 2000), especially those that require such a fundamental social justice commitment. "A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time [. . .] an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge [. . .]" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In other words, the creation of social justice educators becomes a transformation of active and peripheral participation within a community, not a transmission of social justice content. Apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1995) within a COP is now noted as an important aspect of teacher learning about cultural diversity and social justice when acknowledging the well-documented "disjuncture between the values and practices and the different settings that comprise teacher education" including the k-12 school site (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999).

The COP approach is an important development in the move from transmission to transformation of

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participation as a model for teacher education. As the COP approach widens its influence on teacher education, it would be wise for teacher educators to challenge this framework to include more rigorous attention to the actual activities in which teachers engage both from a process and content point of view. The COP approach could benefit from attention to cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and critical pedagogy (CP). These theoretical traditions would assist teachers and teacher educators in making sense of the kind activities that provide the most potential for social justice teacher education.

Utilizing data from a larger study, this paper provides a framework rooted in CHAT and CP for understanding how preservice teachers develop a political consciousness and cultural sensitivity in their teaching (Artiles, 1999; Hoffman-Kipp, 2002). In other words, how are preservice teachers' learning processes rooted in social encounters with other peers; mediated by artifacts provided by their TEP, their prior beliefs and identities; and reflected in the preservice teachers' changing participation over time during their participation in the student teaching seminar?[3] The questions that guided the larger project were the following:

(a) What is the *nature of teacher learning* about student cultural diversity that occurred in the seminar? How was this learning related to the development of a political consciousness in each participant? How was their learning mediated by prior beliefs, emerging identities and programmatic artifacts introduced during their first year?

(b) *Opportunities for change*: How were seminar participants given the opportunity to develop both an enriched understanding of the connections between student culture and learning processes AND a political consciousness about their role as teacher?

CHAT:
The process of the COP

Seeing teacher change and teacher learning as developmental, some teacher education researchers use cultural-historical theory as a lens through which to view teachers' learning and developmental trajectories (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Putnam & Borko, 2000). These researchers believe that CHAT's focus on culture, change, and activity makes it an especially robust theoretical framework for analyzing teacher learning for social justice.

CHAT relies on observing developmental moments that occur naturally in dialogue. These moments are seen to reflect learning "in interaction with others in a specific activity setting" (Rueda, Gallego, & Moll, 2000, p. 71). Meaning and meaning-making processes are a part of the context in which they arise and "emerge from participation in culturally organized activity" (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997, p. 124). Further, this "situative perspective" (Greeno, 1997; Greeno, Collins, &

Resnick, 1996, cited in Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 4) focuses not solely on intra-individual cognition, but backgrounds the individual's thought processes so as to foreground the interpersonal participation that Vygotsky (1978) suggested precedes individual development. Thus, instead of viewing learning as transmitting facts from teacher to student, CHAT emphasizes participation, relationships, culture, history, and artifact mediation within an "activity setting" as precursors to internalization and development.

Participation is essential to learning, and the perspective CHAT provides reveals the power structures inherent in interpersonal participation. Rogoff (1995) notes that by attending to the comprehensive cultural/historical activities and practices, the content of learning is revealed as tightly linked to the method of teaching.

CP:

The content of the COP

CP adds an important dimension to a focus on participation. Arguing for a desocializing[4] model of education, Shor (1987) lists and explains the following themes for a new pedagogy for teacher education: Dialogue Teaching, Critical Literacy, Situated Pedagogy, Ethnography and Cross-Cultural Communications, Change-Agency, Inequality in School and Society, and Performing Skills. Critical educators utilize ethnography to come to know differing cultures evident in their students. From the foundational approach of understanding context, critical educators seek cross-cultural communication through the discussion of identity, culture, and politics. However, situated pedagogy (Shor, 1987), as opposed to the situative perspective, realizes the myth of value-free learning and attempts to conceive of knowledge as power, situating the knowledge being explored in an understanding of what education is and does in the larger milieu of the state and society. Situated pedagogy attempts to challenge tradition and mass culture (Kellner, 1995) by looking for myths to explode, and, by doing so, to expose that history is dynamic, not static (Freire, 1970/1996). Through these beginnings, situated pedagogy seeks to conscientize a group, students and teacher, so that they can form a culture of resistance to the hegemony that traditional education espouses as empirical (Hirsch, 1987). The methods may be the same, but the ends are different.

Critical pedagogues look at the power relations inherent in subject matter and social relations. At their best, critical pedagogues are rigorous in their attempts to conscientize[5] (Freire, 1970/1996) students both about those relations in and outside the official and unofficial (Apple, 1993) curriculum, as both student and teacher learn to read social relations in the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Critical thinking is rediscovered as a political task (McLaren, 1998) that involves the person in social activity who acknowledges the synonymy of power and social relations. From this perspective, schools become places where students develop the skills to produce the

knowledge necessary for living in a democracy (Giroux, 1988). In order to reconceptualize schools "democratically," teachers (as transformative intellectuals) need to be inscribed in this process as educators who combine scholarly reflection and practice with a commitment to educate students actively and critically. Thus the intersection of CP with CHAT reveals a simultaneous focus on process and content, analyzing full participation in the COP through a more rigorous theory of practice.

Methods

This article reports on themes discovered in a larger study (Hoffman-Kipp, 2002) about four preservice teachers in their first year in an explicitly social justice oriented TEP. Each participant was selected due to her consistent participation in the student teaching seminar, the focus of the study. One participant, Karen, a Latina woman,[6] was selected for this paper as a representative case. Little Spanish was spoken in her home, although her mother and she are fluent. Her mother was discouraged by Karen's choice to teach as it appeared to return Karen to the kind of neighborhood that her mother worked so hard to leave behind. Because of the interesting connections between Karen's identity and her learning about language issues, she is the focus of this paper.

The seminar course, in which the preservice teachers met and discussed theory and practice, convened each week for the first year of the preservice teachers' program. A clinical faculty member served as facilitator of a critical dialogue linking university coursework with field observations while explicitly fostering a political and multicultural approach to teaching. Thus, the seminar represents the nexus of several intersections of theory, practice, and artifact usage and functioned as a type of model activity system (Cole, 1996) for preservice teachers to explore their practice.

Two rounds of interviews were conducted, one in December and the other in May or June. These interviews served to mark the beginning and end of the observation period. Observations were videotaped and transcribed and occurred over a six-month period from December 15, 1998 to May 20, 1999. In total there were ten seminars videotaped. Each seminar was videotaped for approximately one hour creating a total of approximately 700 pages of transcription. These transcripts were analyzed based on the research questions while allowing for themes to emerge that might not be encapsulated in the questions. I chose to report findings based on individual's changes over the six months utilizing the interviews as background data on which to rely for deeper information.

Interviews were incorporated to better understand how personal and professional narratives mediate teacher learning and identity development (Knowles, 1993; Shepel, 1995). From a cultural-historical perspective, beliefs are important psychological artifacts that mediate an individual's learning processes. Ten semi-

nars were videotaped. Each observation/video recording lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Consistent with the study's theoretical framework, the observations and video recordings concentrated on the social organization of learning (Rogoff, 1997). Given the nature of the seminar course, there were typically between seven and 10 people in the room surrounding a circular table.

Findings

Here I provide more theoretical currency for grounding the intersection of COP, CHAT, and CP through a look at one theme (the politics of language) emerging from the larger study (Hoffman-Kipp, 2002) and the relationship of this theme to important concepts from this theoretical intersection. The theme reveals how one preservice teacher engaged with notions about how to create a COP that acknowledges a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/1996) about language and culture. The theme also reveals how difficult this theoretical intersection is to instantiate.

The Politics of Language Usage

As language policy and strategies for assisting English language learners was one focus of the seminar, preservice teachers spent substantial time discussing how to connect with students whose home language is different from English. The result of these conversations reveals a growing repertoire of strategies without, at first, a concomitant development of a philosophy about difference, diversity, and culture and an understanding of the power and political issues involved in these concepts. The strategies developed in this section that seemed most ripe for addressing cultural diversity and social justice (the stated aims of the study) focused mainly on developing English competence. However, there were some notable exceptions when meaning-making within the home language was stressed with translation to English as an important but secondary goal. Similarly, Karen's efforts to deal with her own feelings about language and her interaction with students and teachers reveal a growing sense of the political tensions of being an urban, public school teacher in a post California Proposition 227 era. The result of the conversation, although at first appearing to neglect issues of power, does in the end seem to reveal the tensions preservice teachers can meet when provided various means to analyze their student teaching.

At first, Karen's concerns about language focus on equal access to the COP whether in the students' home language or standard English. In response to a conversation about meeting the needs of both home and school languages in small groups, Karen talks about participation patterns, language status, and how quiet students who don't understand can fly under the teacher's radar, a classic problem for the COP approach's focus on participation.

I was in that situation with our reading groups because exactly half of my group

spoke Spanish and read in Spanish and the other half ended up being boys and girls. And the English people were the boys and they refused to even speak in Spanish or anything, they're like: "No we don't like Spanish, Spanish is stupid." And I'm like well, I tried to talk to them about language and all that stuff, and then I'm like: "Okay back to work." And, it was really difficult for me [. . .], I mean they're reading out loud so I would go from half of them read together [. . .] and have the Spanish people read in Spanish silently, and then I'd switch. But then the boys were in English so if I wasn't [. . .] reading with the English group they wouldn't be reading, they tried to just fool around. So I found myself paying more attention to them, which I felt like I wasn't being fair to the Spanish group. So it's hard to balance out because you end up going towards people who aren't cooperating, and that's not really fair. And that's kind of the theme of the whole classroom. Like if you're, you know, making a fuss about something, raising your hand, complaining, then you get the attention. If not, you're on your own. And it's frustrating because you want to be helping the Spanish people but if they're good, then they get looked over. (1/22/99)

There are several issues that Karen confronts immediately in her efforts to accommodate two languages in her lesson. The first is language status ("And the English people were the boys and they refused to even speak in Spanish or anything, they're like: 'No we don't like Spanish, Spanish is stupid.'"). This recognition on Karen's part opens the door to a conversation about language, power, and equal opportunity to be a member of the COP ("And I'm like well, I tried to talk to them about language and all that stuff"), however, she quickly moves back to the preplanned lesson ("and then I'm like: 'Okay back to work.'"). In analyzing her words in the seminar, what becomes clear is that she feels a tension between talking about language status and returning to a discussion of how her lesson went. In other words, Karen appears to feel that she should speak about her pedagogic concerns rather than her perceptions about language status and repercussions on the COP in her classroom. She feels that the importance of the lesson is in the language skills students are building and thus tries to maintain her focus on the preplanned lesson rather than redirecting to a conversation about language and power. In terms of the theoretical intersection of COP, CHAT, and CP, Karen may feel that the focus of the student teaching seminar should be on pedagogy, not a discussion of "language and all that stuff." Yet the boys' comment about language reveals an opportunity, that Karen recognizes, to situate her pedagogy within a discussion of full participation and language status.

Instead, Karen turns her attention to fairness within the lesson ("I felt like I wasn't being fair to the Spanish group. So it's hard to balance out because you end up going towards people who aren't cooperating, and that's not really fair."), but in turn loses the teachable moment on language itself. She focuses on the quiet students getting overlooked ("if they're good, then they get looked over."). Karen's focus on participation is firmly rooted in conversations about full access to the COP, but this theoretical model doesn't seem to require a conversation about power even

though she herself recognized this aspect of her lesson. For example, her next statement:

> You know if you're like sitting there and there's a girl [. . .] who came from Guatemala two days ago [. . .] And she's so good, she smiles at you, she looks at you like she understands every word your saying. [. . .] And, I asked her in Spanish if she understands, [and] she went [and] sat down. She didn't know how to do it. You know, I mean, I, I asked her. I thought she was okay, but you don't know. So it is hard. There's the balance issue that I can't find how to do it yet. (1/22/99)

Karen's tension is clear: her pedagogical concern for balance appears to outweigh the cultural implications of the experience the Guatemalan girl is having in Karen's classroom. However, in the same seminar, Karen's identity appears to be her way to more successfully address this tension and analyze her classroom on several levels.

In an interesting turn of events in the seminar, Karen changes roles. CHAT suggests that this type of role shift is a precursor to development (Vygotsky, 1978). In fact, a focus on participation shifts can reveal a participant's "flexibility and attitude toward change in involvement (interest in learning versus rejection of new roles or protection of the status quo)" (Rogoff, 1997, p. 280). Karen herself quickly becomes a facilitator and reveals a deeper sense to her understanding of language and power in her classroom.

> *[Another preservice teacher #1]*: I think it's strange, why is it insulting to them? [. . .] Because I feel that way too, like I've been trying to speak Spanish or English to certain kids but it's kind of weird, afterwards, like why is it bad, why was that bad that the child feels that she has to pretend that she spoke English instead of Spanish?
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> *Karen*: I think its about socialization that if you, if you speak Spanish they definitely don't feel as smart, because of the status. [. . .] But, I mean those are the only times, and I'm wondering if it's just because they're assuming you don't, like it's [not] typical for you to speak Spanish, so they're like, "I'll understand you if you speak English."
>
> *[Another preservice teacher #2]*: It's like you are telling them that you are underestimating them. [. . .]
>
> *The facilitator*: [. . .] The kids here for the most part will make choices of language if they are bilingual, and they make different choices of language at different times, under different conditions, or depending on the mood, or . . . (1/22/99)

Karen reveals that she understands that her students' choices about language are rooted in status. She assists the other preservice teacher in understanding that this is important. Karen's identity as a bilingual Latina appears to mediate her under-standing of students' experiences with language. Further supporting her in this direction, the facilitator tries to prompt the preservice teachers with a discussion of the bilingual children's agency to choose their language depending upon their

situation. The discussion assists Karen in solidifying her sense that students' identity is more than just a pedagogic concern.

Three weeks later, in her work to see how students are whole people who exist outside of the formal context where she is the master teacher, Karen found how to relate to a student by speaking on his level. The student was able to identify with her, because she demonstrates how both of them read at the same level in Spanish. Her demonstrated ability seemed to foster trust.

> I was excited because [Jose[7]] in our class has really taken to me. Like he gave me a hug today when I came in the classroom, and he's, I mean last time I sat next to him and I was, you know, just trying to get him to say just one word to me and slowly like I'd read with him and he realized that I read at his level in Spanish. So we read together, we help each other, he does a page, I do a page, and he just…it's really cool, it's a neat feeling. That I kind of feel like I made a step forward with him, and I did speak with [the teacher] about his past and [. . .] I didn't realize how hard he has it. (2/12/99)

The facilitator's comments reflect her encouragement for Karen to continue in a direction of discovery about the student's life history:

> ◆ What did you find out that, that was significant, that helps understand what it is that you're seeing? [. . .]

> ◆ Did you find out about home? [. . .]

> ◆You should get some more information about him. Because that will help you understand the pattern that you're seeing in his behavior. [. . .]

> ◆ So what are you finding when you work with them one on one? Do you like that? What do you think the difference is? (2/12/99)

The conversation with the facilitator emphasizes how knowledge about home life can help teachers to connect with students. CHAT and CP prompt us to think beyond the walls of the classroom culture to that of the community in which students' identities, mediated by their home language, are being created. They help us to think of a cultural negotiation perspective by thinking "[i]n terms of a *cultural* constructivism in which both self and culture — together being the distributed self — are continually changing, developing, making meaning, and making culture" (Stairs, 1996, p. 231). Here we see the issue Vygotsky raised about studying psychological processes when they are fossilized.[8] When culture becomes fossilized in order to be studied, we lose the benefit of studying cultural construction, or psychological processes in development: their natural state. For teachers, this concept is essential as it alludes to the natural learning and developmental process at work in students' lives before, during, and after any formal lesson takes place. What teachers might seek instead, Stairs (1996) argues, is: "[. . .] moments of insight into the nature of active, distributed, continual participation; the cultural constructivism that integrates what, how, and why into a full sense of [being] human" (p. 233). Or in CP terms: "[. . .]

thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 73).

In another seminar (1/28/99), Karen seems to be developing a keener sense of how language produces certain hierarchical relationships in the curriculum itself. She has a developing sense of the power dynamics inherent in the language utilized in the classroom and the way that she can organize instruction so students don't feel one language is favored.

> [. . .] Usually you put English and you translate into Spanish, so I found that the English people were thinking of the sentence, and that all of the Spanish people were just translating it. So I was trying to get it to change because only English people were doing their work. It was hard [for a Spanish speaker] to stand up and [respond when prompted]: "now it's your turn to think of a sentence." [. . .] (1/28/99)

By acknowledging the power dynamic underlying the assignment, Karen is recognizing the way that her instructional strategy may actually suggest to the students that a hierarchy exists between the two languages. This step demonstrates Karen's ability to ask deep questions about pedagogy from the cultural/historical sensibility she has been honing. CHAT reminds us that in the investigation of activity, participation can be analyzed on a microgenetic, ontogenetic, cultural/historical, and even phylogenetic level. Typically, classroom analysis stays at the microgenetic, or minute-to-minute level. However, as Karen realizes the implications of her choices in the moment from a larger perspective, her questions center on how to implement a lesson that is culturally and linguistically sensitive. These levels can correlate with CP's focus on culture and power that overshadow interpersonal relations. Karen is beginning to develop a "whole-person" approach discussed above.

In a subsequent moment, Karen demonstrates the way that the conversation about language prompts her to think of pedagogical and humanistic approaches to language, countering the focus on only one COP and widening the focus to the community. The conversation surrounds Karen's development.

> *The facilitator*: What if were not talking about methodological alternatives? I know, I know you guys are. You always talk about methodology. [. . .] In second language [acquisition]. So how about if we go beyond that? So here you are in a class and you know there are students who really need to have support. How can that support come in a way that's not really with a methodology?

> *Karen*: Show them you care and then showing them you know they are struggling, and you do understand them, and are supportive in that way.

A brief conversation about the specifics of the California Proposition 227 legislation ensues with a clarification of the specific activities which are governed by the law. The facilitator prompts with a comment about where relationships could be built with students outside the formal classroom setting.

The facilitator: During lunch time. You know, the way you interact walking, places during the day: [the law] doesn't effect you at all in that context, so even in the most restrictive environment, you know, if you were to land in a school where they said: "No Spanish here," [. . .] You are building some very strong relationships outside of the classroom.

Another preservice teacher: Notice that all the stuff that we are talking about is: community studies, calling parents, etc. [. . .] You know, all the stuff that goes on here in our offices: from the parents coming in and doing [stuff]. But, like becoming a part of a community's services [. . .] You can become involved in that. I think in reaching a child in all different levels, [. . .] not just like academic [. . .] (1/28/99)

The conversation in the seminar reveals a progressive discussion surrounding language issues that prompts preservice teachers to think about the COP of their classroom and the overlapping communities of practice such as the school, district, and larger community. Karen's subsequent efforts reveal her attempts to pedagogically incorporate her focus on her students as people with communities, linguistic histories, families, and experiences they bring with them to school. As preservice teachers perceive their students on several levels that CHAT and CP provide for analysis, a deeper sense of the richness of the COP perspective is possible.

Conclusions:
Essential Elements of Social Justice Teacher Education

Throughout this study, I was reminded of the process through which the TEP's working definition of social justice came into existence, and how even still the product remains a "working" definition. So also are participants in this study works in progress who continue to define themselves, their strategies and philosophies, and their beliefs about teaching. This intersection of political content from CP with situative and distributed notions of cognition from CHAT could broaden the COP discussion surrounding how teachers learn to teach in urban, multicultural settings. In order to assist teacher educators in their attempts to instantiate social justice teacher education, I make the following comments.

1. CHAT as utilized in a COP approach to teacher learning can ignore power as an important analytic level/lens through which to view classroom activity. Too often, preservice teachers, especially in their student teaching, are focused on individual pedagogic moments and the proper response. Articulating a vision of their personal philosophy rooted in social justice requires a conversation about power, a philosophic approach that can seem unproductive in the face of the concrete demands of becoming a teacher.

2. CP can introduce a conversation about power, but remains a sociopolitical theory without a detailed vision of teacher learning. A union of

CHAT and CP could provide the kind of teacher education model that utilizes the full range of analysis of classroom activity a social justice educator needs: individual, interpersonal, institutional OR microgenetic, ontogenetic, cultural/historical, and phylogenetic.

3. Dialogue as a non-negotiable, institutionalized method requires teachers to be active, engaged learners who are constantly existing in a theoretically grounded approach to their practice and seeks a multi-perspectival approach to analyzing classroom activity. Teachers are researchers who can discuss practice with other professionals, university and K-12, through this theory of practice.

4. Teachers as members of a social movement. Without the solidarity that collective identity brings, social justice commitments can waiver in the face of bureaucracy and the immense problems urban schools face. Teacher must be inscribed into a progressive movement of which teaching is only a part. Affordable housing and healthcare, rights of the undocumented, lesbian and gay marital and adoption rights, and economic justice, all of these progressive issues become a part of the social justice educator's concern for the community in which s/he teaches.

In other words, social justice education cannot stop at the classroom door but requires a theory of practice that visualizes human development as social; mediated; influenced by power and axes of power such as race, gender, sexuality, and class; and historical on both ontogenetic and cultural levels. Teachers must be discussing these issues in order to fully participate in the COP of the TEP and their future community of social activists or their home in a social movement. In this way, the COP concept must be expanded to include CHAT and CP notions that invigorate the conversation around both its political purpose and the content of the conversation. In essence, to what kind of TEP community do we want our future teachers to belong?

Notes

[2] One of the research groups connected with the TEP in this study proposed that social justice education: "(1) considers the values and politics that pervade education, as well as the technical matters of teaching and learning, (2) asks critical questions about how conventional schooling came to be and about who benefits from the status quo, (3) pays attention to inequalities and seeks alternatives, and (4) treats cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset to teaching and learning" (TEP Working Definition, 1999).

[3] First and second year students take a seminar, Education 360A-360B-360C, known

as the "Team Seminars" throughout their two years in the program. The first year seminar coincides with student teaching. The university's course catalog describes it this way: "Seminar, four hours; laboratory, two hours. Analysis and practice of basic principles and concepts of planning, conducting, and evaluating units of curriculum and instruction. Emphasis on study and utilization of constructivist strategies and their application in elementary and secondary schools. Examination of different methods of computer literacy and teaching subject matter. Students conduct ethnographic inquiry of the local community of their demonstration school. S/U grading."

[4] Socialization used in the sense of Gutierrez and Larson's (1994) critique of teacher education: "It is important to also recognize that teachers too have been socialized through their own lived experiences as students in classrooms where these were the normative practices. In particular, teachers in the pre-service experiences are socialized, in both theory and practice, to acontextual, acultural, apolitical, and ahistorical visions of teaching and learning. They too are kept on the margins and silenced through poor working conditions, meager salaries, inadequate preparation, and few opportunities to become the reflective and critical practitioners they struggle to be" (p. 33-4).

[5] Conscientization comes from the Portuguese word "concenticazao" which means the process of developing a critical consciousness about the world. This type of consciousness can be equated to a Marxist consciousness which views true power relations as economically based.

[6] Name is a pseudonym and ethnicity was self-reported to the student services office.

[7] Pseudonym.

[8] "[T]hese psychologists were not interested in complex reactions as a process of development… it might be said that complex reactions have been studied postmortem" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 68, cited in Wertsch, 1979, p. 29).

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